

## **It was an entitlement, not a handout for those who attended the DC VAMC Winterhaven Homeless Veterans Stand Down**

The majority walked in unassisted, while some used walking canes, rode in powerchairs and a few escorted by their family members and friends as they arrived at the Washington, DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) on Saturday, 28 January 2017.

Upon registration, those eligible were provided a large checklist used to navigate numerous stations, with some mandatory. Many stations were manned by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees. There was Asiya R. Fowler, National Cemetery Administration and Erin Gittens, Veterans Benefits Administration, Benefits Assistance Service, whose main focus was to increase the community awareness of VA benefits and programs. Other stations were represented by the expected 60 local community partners such as Red Cross, Haute Hair Rx and The Mission Continues organizations, each provided invaluable information about their respective services.

When Dr. David J. Shulkin, VA Under Secretary for Health and Brian A. Hawkins, Director, DC VAMC stopped at the first station with Dwayne E. Campbell and Ronald Sagudan, VA Center for Minority Veterans and Erica F. Drame, Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP), each representing a staff office of the VA Office of the Secretary (OSVA). They were greeted with the same respect and dignity shown to all in attendance. The I.C.A.R.E. core values of the VA were front and center, being felt as they radiated throughout the medical center.

These values – Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence – define our culture and strengthen our dedication to those we serve. They provide a baseline for the standards of behavior expected of all VA employees. For every VA employee to embody our core values was imperative, since this wasn't some ordinary event. This was the 23rd Annual Winterhaven Homeless Veterans Stand Down. Those Veterans who came through the DC VAMC doors on Saturday, no matter their individual housing status were the crown jewels of our nation presenting all military branches. Proud.

It was our responsibility to ensure they did not feel or were treated as if they were receiving a handout. It was our duty based on the mission of the VA to fulfill President Lincoln's promise: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans. This treatment was not special only to this event. It is extended daily to the 24.4 million Veterans and their eligible family members across the country that will use VA facilities.

In every sense of the word, this was truly a one stop shop and resource haven which touched over 700 Veterans in need. The full day of services, addressed many of the contributing factors associated with homelessness, include: one-on-one employment, education and housing counseling, financial planning, substance abuse and rehabilitative programs and psychosocial services. Winterhaven attendees who were underemployed and at-risk of homelessness had access to resources to assistance in foreclosure or rental eviction avoidance, utility bill assistance and legal aid. Veterans also received health assessments, HIV testing, specialty care exams including: dental, podiatry and audiology as well as warm clothing, boots, haircuts, personal care packs and a warm meal.

Winterhaven is invaluable for at-risk and homeless Veterans, according to the medical center's Coordinator Kevin Morton, Health Care for the Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program. Morton, said, "It's important to bring VA staff together with federal, local and state government agencies, Veteran Service Organizations, as well as corporate and non-profit community partners to offer a one-stop-shop opportunity of health care, benefits and community resources to strengthen efforts and to collectively prevent Veteran homelessness."

The success of this Stand Down would not have occurred had it not been for the over 350 community volunteers and government agencies joining forces to eliminate and avert Veteran homelessness in the DC metropolitan area. There was Kevin Stanford, OSVA, Volunteer Service who wore a red t-shirt

signifying he was a volunteer and available to assist Veterans. Another VA employee Kathleen Sullivan, Veterans Health Administration, Office of Outreach Collaboration arrived at 6:30AM and worked as a volunteer lifting and moving items, pushing wheelchairs and provided VHA information at her station.

There is no more important mission than to serve those who sacrificed so much for our country and for all of us - protecting our freedom and way of life. The VA CFBNP mission is to engage, inform and educate faith-based, nonprofit and community/neighborhood organizations in VA programs to better serve the needs of Veterans, their families, Survivors, caregivers and other beneficiaries. The only way CFBNP will achieve our mission is by developing and cultivating partnerships with those in the community who are already providing services to Veterans.

VA CFBNP would like to hear about the good work your organization is doing in the community to support Veterans, who walk through your doors on a daily basis. Most of all, CFBNP wants to know how we can assist with tools and resources, in order for your organization to become a collaborative partner working to make Veterans aware of the benefits they have earned and deserve and to understand how they can access their VA benefits.

Click [here](http://www.va.gov/cfbnpartnerships) (www.va.gov/cfbnpartnerships) to join our Listserv to receive information about CFBNP upcoming events. Please contact, Erica F. Drame, Program Specialist for CFBNP Outreach and Communications with any questions at [erica.drame@va.gov](mailto:erica.drame@va.gov) or 202-461-6829.

## References

VA.gov VA » Health Care » Washington DC VA Medical Center » Winterhaven 2017

Washington DC VA Medical Center

([http://www.washingtondc.va.gov/features/Winterhaven\\_2017.asp](http://www.washingtondc.va.gov/features/Winterhaven_2017.asp))

- The full day of services, which address many of the contributing factors associated with homelessness, include: one-on-one employment, education and housing counseling, financial planning, substance abuse and rehabilitative programs and psychosocial services. Winterhaven attendees who are underemployed and at-risk of homelessness will have access to resources to assist in foreclosure or rental eviction avoidance, utility bill assistance and legal aid.
- Veterans will also receive health assessments, HIV testing, specialty care exams including: dental, podiatry and audiology as well as warm clothing, boots, haircuts, personal care packs and a warm meal.
- Participants will personally meet with the more than 60 community organizations, over 350 community volunteers and government agencies which have joined forces with the DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center to eliminate and avert Veteran homelessness in the DC metropolitan area.
- According to HCHV Coordinator Kevin Morton, Winterhaven is invaluable for at-risk and homeless Veterans. "It's important to bring VA staff together with federal, local and state government agencies, Veteran Service Organizations, as well as corporate and non-profit community partners to offer a one-stop-shop opportunity of health care, benefits and community resources to strengthen efforts and to collectively prevent Veteran homelessness."

VA.gov VA » I CARE Core Values

I CARE Core Values

(<https://www.va.gov/icare/>)

- VA's Mission  
To fulfill President Lincoln's promise: *"To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan"* by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.
- These values — Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence — define our culture and strengthen our dedication to those we serve. They provide a baseline for the standards of behavior expected of all VA employees.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Caring for Those Who Have Borne the Battle, Secretary Robert McDonald Cabinet Exit Memo dated January 5, 2017

(<https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/docs/VA-Exit-Memo.pdf>)

Record of Progress: Achievements for Veterans, page 3

- Thanks to President Obama's unwavering support and advocacy for Veterans, VA's outreach efforts, and the work of dedicated VA employees, we have improved from about 11.6 million of 26.4 million Veterans and eligible family members receiving some type of VA care and services in 2009 (44 percent), to approximately 12.8 million of 24.4 million Veterans and eligible family members receiving them at the end of 2016 (52 percent).

VA.gov Quote from a letter by Secretary Robert McDonald

There is no more important mission than to serve those who sacrificed so much for our country and for all of us - protecting our freedom and way of life.